

County Records Building
Charleston, South Carolina

HABS No. 13-2
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 13

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Samuel Latham, District Officer
42 Broad St. Charleston, S.C.

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS

COUNTY RECORDS BUILDING
Chalmers and Meeting Streets
Charleston, Charleston County
South Carolina

Owner: County.

Date of Erection: { former building
on the site } { present
Mills Bldg. }
1788-1800 (card); 1822 (drawing).

Architect: Robert Mills.

Builder:

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: Three.

Materials of Construction: Brick and stucco.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

THE COUNTY RECORDS BUILDING
WASHINGTON SQUARE
CHARLESTON, S. C.

SURVEY NO. 13-2

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This building, designed by Robert Mills for the preservation of public records, was constructed in 1822 and finished, according to Mills himself, in 1826. It is generally referred to as the first fireproof building in America, but how true this statement may be is not known. Mills intended it to be fireproof as he refers to it as "the building for the fireproof offices for the public records". All the floors are of brick or stone carried by brick vaults and served by a stone staircase. Wood floors have been laid over the brick ones.

The building has been little changed, except that the original copper roof has been replaced with tin. The copper roofing was stolen by vandals just after the "War between the States". The original main stairs from the ground to the two porticos were curved in a sort of half spiral as shown on the ground floor plan. Some of the parapet fell during the Charleston earthquake in 1886 and damaged the brown sandstone steps and the hand-wrought iron railing. The existing exterior stairs were built by a Mr. E. T. Vielt, in 1886-87. The vault on the ground floor appears to have been put in after the building was completed. Although there is no record of this, there are visible signs of where two doors from the corridors to a probable storage room have been closed with masonry. There is also an opening protected by iron bars that

evidently opened from this supposed storage room to the north portico, the same condition as regards the storage room, doors and outside opening existing now in the south end of the building.

Mills' own description of this building is as follows:

"To the northwest angle of the square, the building for the fire proof or state-offices for the public records is erected. This edifice (now finishing) in its form is a complete contrast to the one just described.

It is designed in the simple Greek Doric style, without any ornament, except that afforded by the porticoes which face each front. These porticoes are each composed of four massy columns three and a half feet diameter, raised on an arcade; the columns rise the whole height of the building (comprising two stories) surmounted by their entablature, and crowned with a pediment, which extending entirely across the building, meet together in the middle; the remaining part of the building, on each side, constitutes wings to the centre, falling below the apex of the pediment; the front of these offices is sixty-six feet, and breadth fifty-six feet, besides the porticoes, which project about twelve, and extend in front thirty-three feet each. They are communicated with from the street by a double flight of stone steps at both ends. The basement, porticoes, cornice, etc. are of stone. The walls are of brick, stuccoed in imitation of the same.

The rooms for offices are vaulted with brick, and the roof covered with copper, so as to render the building secure from fire. As a further guard the sashes and frames are all of iron with the shutters.

Each front presents two doors of entrance which lead into corridors communicating with the several offices. The number of distinct apartments in the several stories includes twenty-four, besides the staircase and passages.

The interior stair-steps are of stone, rising from the basement story to the third floor, and lighted by a sky-light.

The officers to be accommodated in this building are the secretary of state, treasurer, comptroller

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general, ordinary, tax collector, register of
mesne conveyance, master in equity, commissioner
in equity, attorney general, surveyor general, etc."

This building has been in continuous use since its
erection, for the purposes indicated above, and is well
preserved. Of late years, however, the Grand Jury has
frequently recommended that it be added to or remodeled
and hence it has been included in this Survey in order to
record its original condition before any modernization
takes place.

This building is, and has been, county property.

Sources of information: "Statistics of South Carolina"
by Robert Mills, Hurlbut and
Lloyd, Charleston, 1826.
Data given to squad leader by
Mr. W. P. Cantwell, who has been
County Supervisor in this building
for fifty-four years.

Data by D. O.
approved

James J. Gaffney

District Officer #13

Revised 1926, H.C. Forman.

County Records Building
(Mesne Conveyance Office)(Fireproof Building)
100 Meeting Street (at Chalmers Street)
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

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Addendum to
County Records Building
Chalmers and Meeting Streets
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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127